Interview with Patience Spiers

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Program
Foreign Service Spouse Series

PATIENCE SPIERS

Interviewed by: Jewell Fenzi

Initial interview date: August 13, 1991

Q: This is Jewell Fenzi on Tuesday, August 13, 1991. I am interviewing Patience Spiers at the Fenzi house in West Townshend, Vermont. Patience has come over from her home in South Londonderry to talk about her Foreign Service experiences emphasizing, perhaps I should add, her involvement in spouse issues.

We can begin by doing a review of your career, or we can start with the main question I wanted to ask you, and that is about your participation in the Wye meetings, when the senior spouses met with — what? Department officials? How did those go, who was invited?

SPIERS: This was right after my husband became Under Secretary for Management, '83'84 I think. I don't remember how the participants were selected but it was with the purpose of trying to create a management situation in the State Department that would be better for the Foreign Service as a whole and spouses and families in particular. That was the general idea of it. Ron could, perhaps, refresh my memory about that. [Participating members of the Management Council were: Director General of the Foreign Service A. Leroy Atherton, Jr.; Inspector General of the Foreign Service William Harrop; Executive Assistant to the Under Secretary for Management Sheldon Krys; Assistant Secretary for Administration Robert Lamb; Head of Management Operations William DePree; Under

Secretary for Political Affairs Lawrence Eagleburger; Director of the Foreign Service Institute Stephen Low; Director Family Liaison Office Marcia Curran; Under Secretary for Management Ron Spiers and Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs Joan Clark. The following spouses were also participants: Atherton, Harrop (?), DePree, Low, and Spiers.]

Q: You did tell me there was discussion about the Foreign Service Associates proposal and that names were being bandied about that you didn't like, and you said let's make it "Foreign Service Associate." Do you remember what some of those other names were?

SPIERS: It seemed to me that "Foreign Service Associates" was less demeaning than some of the other titles — [they agree that having discussed this over a year ago, recollection is unclear] — you don't remember?.

Q: No.

SPIERS: I think one may have been "Foreign Service Dependent" or "Dependent Spouses." I don't remember the others, but I think that "Foreign Service Associates" appealed to me because it had no connotation of a superior and/or subordinate relationship, it was just an association, of one sort or another.

Q: Did they discuss the Foreign Service Associate proposal at those meetings? Did that grow out of those meetings, or was the proposal brought to the meeting after we responded to the FLO questionnaire. I was in Trinidad at the time, as the CLO, and I remember sending in a cable.

SPIERS: I don't think that it arose from those meetings. I think the idea was already being talked about by the women, and the men in management positions at that point became aware of it. The proposal didn't come out of that meeting and wasn't shaped at the meeting. I think the proposal was shaped more by the women, by Forum, and other such discussions, not by the Wye proposals.

Q: And nothing definitive about the spouses came out of the Wye meeting?

SPIERS: Well, it's always been limited by budget so severely that nothing significant really could ever develop because of the problem of funding, I think.

Q: And they never talked of reapportioning representational funds so that spouses could be paid salaries?

SPIERS: I think it's always been a problem of getting proposals of that sort through Congress. Congressman Neil Smith's committee, the House Appropriations subcommittee that deals with State Department budgets, is a little bit resistant to ideas of this sort. Smith has been in Congress for about 40 years, his wife has always played a traditional role, and he doesn't see any need for such a change.

Q: There's a new congressional book, Political Wives: Veiled Lives, written by a young Representative's wife who complains about the back seat that she has to take as a political wife. She appeared on the Diane Rehm [local morning call in talk] Show recently and a very articulate Foreign Service wife called in and said, "You're going to hear from another segment of the population (both laugh) that leads exactly the kind of life you're talking about now — that you're a nonperson, there's no role."

It just seems to me that in the 1990s this is not realistic, because the young women that I talk to at the Foreign Service Institute's "Introduction to the Foreign Service" course want to be a part of something. They don't want to be nonpeople. How to do that without a lot of congressional approval and millions of dollars? It should be possible.

SPIERS: It should be, and I think that Brandon Grove has been doing an excellent job as director of FSI in so far as he can have an input on that problem.

Q: I would like to ask you one thing. As I said, I was in Trinidad when the Associates proposals came out, and my admin officer — since your husband is in that area! — said

that the Associate proposal as sent out to all posts would never fly. Because, he said, Congress would never appropriate funds for a Foreign Service wife to go out to a country and engage in volunteer work that has no direct bearing on the embassy, that doesn't really meet the needs of the Service.

How was the Associate proposal treated that seriously if he's right? I had to agree with him. I can't believe Congress would appropriating funds for it, but you've been closer to the source, maybe there's something that (she laughs) I don't know.

SPIERS: I think that perhaps it was unrealistic to expect Congress to do that, but I also think that it would be possible to develop a process so that spouses could be compensated in some way — and certainly my husband took it seriously in his job. I think maybe it was with a little prodding from me (laughing).

Q: But he thought perhaps something could be worked out? Well, of course they did take portions of it [the Associates proposal]. When the security scandal occurred in Moscow, spouses were immediately employed there and in some other Iron Curtain countries. So it seemed to me that the Department took a feasible part of it and adapted it to their needs.

My admin officer in Trinidad — I learned more about the Foreign Service in my two years as a CLO than I did the other twenty-eight years — would greet most of my ideas with “the needs of the Service” “the needs of the Service” “the needs of the Service.”

SPIERS: Well, I think sometimes the people in Washington, particularly those who are political appointees, not members of the Service and who have not been interested in it or pay much attention, don't know what the needs of the Service are. In my opinion many of the volunteer jobs that people do do meet some of the needs of the Service but are just not recognized; certainly not by Congress. But I still think it's feasible to have a supplementary income that would be possible, as many other foreign services have, as the

Japanese do and some others, to have a supplement to the family income that is paid if the wife plays an active role in her husband's Foreign Service career.

Q: I've detected that they really want recognition, too. They don't want to be nonpersons. One young spouse with tears in her eyes said, “This is the first time in my life that I've had nothing to fill in a blank for “occupation.”

SPIERS: I'm always torn between putting in “none” ...

Q: (laughing) But you did, you put “none” and I put “Foreign Service spouse question mark.” So I'll have to take that out ...

SPIERS: By saying “none” it's a statement. Sometimes I put “unemployed.” (laughter) It's literally true.

Q: You were in Washington from '55 to '66, is that right?

SPIERS: Well, my husband started working for the government when he finished graduate school in 1950, but in the beginning he worked for the Atomic Energy Commission. He always wanted to be in the State Department. From the time he was 12 he wanted to be a Foreign Service Officer, but at the time he was job hunting there wasn't an opening available, so he went in as a Foreign Service Reserve and then became a regular FSO. But because of the assignments he had we just stayed in Washington for quite a long time, a total of 16 years from our first move to Washington in 1950 until 1966 when we went to London.

Q: Was his appointment held up because of McCarthy?

SPIERS: No, it wasn't that. I don't remember that it was held up particularly. It was just that he was looking for a job, had finished graduate school, had a wife and baby on the way — he took what he could find!

Q: So your 16 years in Washington were as a bride and a young mother.

SPIERS: Yes. All four of my children were born during those years in Washington. When we went to London in 1966 my oldest daughter, born in 1951, was already in high school.

Q: Since I'm not at home and couldn't do "homework" for our interview, refresh my memory about what was happening in England between '66 and '69?

SPIERS: Well, it was a time, of a Labour Government. This was our first foreign service post. In the beginning Ron was the Political-Military Counselor because during the Washington years he'd been working in disarmament and related matters in IO. He had always worked in multilateral affairs — NATO, UN, and so on. Then two jobs were combined and he became the Political Counselor, as well as Politico/Military Counselor.

David K.E. Bruce was the Ambassador. He's one of my great memories — such a courtly, old world gentleman and diplomat, it was a great pleasure to have him as a first Ambassador. And Evangeline Bruce too was a model to emulate, I think. Very traditional in her expectations for the younger wives. She had a coffee meeting once a month to which we received formal written invitations, and were expected to respond with formal written acceptances or regrets. To regret, one had to have a very good reason. You were expected to attend, and to wear a hat and gloves to these morning coffees.

Q: Well, of course she'd grown up in the Foreign Service.

SPIERS: Yes, and it was a pattern that I never saw copied again in any other place. I think she used that as a way of training younger wives how to write formal notes and how to respond to invitations, and it was useful for that reason. Although many people objected to the requirements, I think it was a useful learning device and beneficial even if (she laughs) slightly onerous at times.

Q: And then was the coffee just a "coffee," or did she have a ...

SPIERS: No. She often had a program of some distinguished playwright or an artist or a musician, someone who would give a talk, and then coffee would be served. It was a cultural program, and a lot of fun, actually. I usually enjoyed it; and that wonderful house in Regents Park in London. So it was a very interesting introduction to the Foreign Service for me.

Q: The Bruces were there for a long time, 13 years. At which end of their service were you there?

SPIERS: Toward the end. We left in '69 just as Walter Annenberg became Ambassador. Then we were gone for four years. We went back to London in '74 just as Annenberg's assignment was ending, so we were there at the very start and at the very end of his stay. After Annenberg, Eliot Richardson came in, then Anne Armstrong, and Kingman Brewster. We really weren't there much in Annenberg's time but he was quite a contrast to David Bruce. (laughter)

Q: I can imagine! I've approached Evangeline Bruce twice in connection with this project. She has come to our annual teas, looking like an absolute fashion plate, and she fills out the little card saying that she's interested in an interview; but then when I call her she has too much on her calendar.

SPIERS: She's awfully busy. And though as Bruce's second wife she was quite a bit younger, she's assuredly not young now. She taught me a lot about clothes — just observing her in those days in London. She had elegant clothes but you saw her wear the same gown over and over again. It always fit beautifully and was fashionable, but she didn't feel the need at all to have a different dress for each occasion. I admired that and always tried to emulate it because (she laughs) it's the practical thing to do — to have a few nice things and wear them until they fall apart.

Q: (laughing) That's what I did — I don't know how nice they were but that's my theory too. Meanwhile, you were in the Bahamas, '73 and '74.

SPIERS: Yes. We were there for only a year, arriving just as the Bahamas became independent in July 1973. Ron was the first ambassador after they became independent, and his task was to open an Embassy. The US had always had a Consulate there (while it was a British colony). Nassau is one of our oldest Diplomatic missions. We went in July, the month independence was achieved, and left a year later and went back to London.

Q: How much of Evangeline Bruce's formality were you able to transfer?. And how did you translate it, really, for an embassy in the Caribbean?

SPIERS: Well, this was also about a year after the Rogers' Directive on wives came out — in '72, wasn't it?

Q: Yes. You call it the "Rogers" Directive?"

SPIERS: He signed it, he was Secretary of State.

Q: I remember Martin Hillenbrand and David Newsom signing the cable, it really was a product of William Macomber's doing — anyway, the '72 Directive had come out during your interval between London and Nassau.

SPIERS: Nassau is a tiny post. I think there may have been five Officers: Ambassador, DCM, Military Attach#, Admin officer, and I believe a Consular Officer. I tried to emulate Evangeline Bruce in giving coffees that had a cultural interest, without the formality. I didn't really sympathize with requiring attendance at these things, or being formally dressed, or having written responses. I think it was a useful learning tool but I never saw myself in that role. And the Directive had come out and (she laughs) I could learn from that.

I remember a particular occasion when I had invited the wives of all the cabinet ministers in the Bahamas to come for coffee and also the Embassy wives. I thought the Embassy wives would enjoy meeting the Bahamian group, which included some very interesting people. One of these women was a very outspoken Communist. It seemed to me there was such an interesting, varied group of people that the Embassy wives would just enjoy it. The Admin Officer's wife, who was very young, refused the invitation and subsequently regretted every invitation I offered her. I finally asked her, “Do you feel that I'm harassing you by inviting you to things at the Embassy?” And she said, “Yes.” I said, “Okay. I'm going to continue to invite your husband because that's part of his job. Any time you want to come you're welcome, but [laughing] I'm not going to invite you any more.” It was really interesting that she felt empowered by the Directive to say this. And, mostly she didn't come, occasionally she did, but it was an illuminating reaction to the Directive, I think.

Q: And what was she doing in the Bahamas that kept her so “busy?”

SPIERS: I don't know. I think that she'd heard that old tale of the “dragon lady ambassador's wife” that we hear so much about and she was just afraid that if she gave me an inch, I'd take a mile; that it was a potential dragon lady and she didn't really want to have anything to do with me.

Q: And that you were a dragon lady only in that you were inviting her to things and she looked upon that as an imposition on her time.

SPIERS: I think she felt at heart a little obligated to come and she didn't want to feel obligated. I think by saying “you can come if you want, if you don't want to it doesn't matter to me,” the problem was resolved. I invited her primarily because I thought she'd be interested but I didn't care whether she came or not.

Q: Did the others come?

SPIERS: Yes. But they were more traditional — well, our DCM was Roz Ridgway, who was unmarried at the time; the Military Attach#'s wife was a very traditional military wife who was accustomed to doing things like that, so she came. We had such a small group that it was a very limited sample of FS spouses.

Q: The very same thing happened on a much larger scale to our ambassador's wife in The Hague when I came up from Rotterdam one day to a tea that she'd very nicely invited us to. There might have been 90 of us at The Hague, plus nearby Amsterdam and Rotterdam, and I think 14 people — she hadn't asked for responses — came. This too was after the '72 Directive. What I learned from that was how she comported herself as an absolute lady and didn't bemoan, "Where is everyone?" The way she handled it was a lesson to me that even under great adversit(laughing) you can maintain your cool. She was a noncareer wife but I learned more from her and I will always remember that situation. I don't think she did anything about it. I don't think anything was written about the rudeness of not responding — you know, just the courtesy to say that you can't come. So it's probably good that you cleared the air with this young woman.

SPIERS: I haven't followed her, I mean, her husband has left the Service and I haven't heard from her; I have wondered if she mellowed at all as the years went on.

Q: Any other experiences during that year?

SPIERS: Well, it was very interesting, because the group of politicians that took over the government in the Bahamas after independence were people without experience in government. I can recall one occasion when the prime minister's wife called me saying that there was some function we were both going to along with all the small Diplomatic community, which comprised a Jamaican, a Haitian, a Brit, and us — that was it, the four countries represented there in our first year — and she asked me if she should wear a hat to this function? And I replied, "Mrs. Pindling, you're the boss. You decide whether you want to wear a hat and (laughter) and we'll all copy you." There was a lot of insecurity

among the people there and it was a very interesting thing to observe. Apart from that I can't think of any ...

Q: And then back to London and the DCM position kept you busy.

SPIERS: Right; and it did. In the three years we were there, the ambassadorship changed three times. So Ron was Charge a lot of the time, and we had a lot of the obligations of Chief of Mission without the position because Elliot Richardson was there less than a year and Anne Armstrong for, I guess, slightly more than a year. Then Kingman Brewster came just as our assignment was ending.

Q: Was there a special allowance to enable you to uphold the Embassy in ...

SPIERS: No. I think we were allowed to use some of the Ambassador's representational fund but apart from that there was no special allowance. We had a wonderful house — in many ways the DCM's house was more manageable than the Ambassador's residence, and it was absolutely the best house I've ever lived in in my life, I just adored it.

Q: Did the staff come with it?

SPIERS: We inherited a Spanish couple — cook and butler — and some cleaning help, and temporary people for big parties. It worked very well, a comfortable arrangement.

Q: You mentioned comparing a picnic given in the ruins of a Buddhist monastery on the northwest frontier of Pakistan to diplomatic receptions at Buckingham Palace.

SPIERS: Yes. Well, the diplomatic reception at Buckingham Palace was an annual event and during both of our London assignments we were included in that guest list, which comprised (from the embassies) all the Counselors, the DCM and Ambassador. It was a very formal, traditional event, in which the expectations were certain required clothing — white tie for the men, long white gloves with a specified number of buttons for the ladies and formal dress and whatever jewelry you possessed. The tradition was that it should be

real jewelry — small but real. At that time (she laughs) I didn't have any real jewelry, so I wore my best fake jewelry. The protocol office at Buckingham Palace gave you detailed directions to follow for dress, arrival time, where you'd stand; it was all very carefully orchestrated with the ease of many, many years.

It was quite a contrast to the events in Pakistan. The picnic that you refer to was an invitation by the chief of the Mohmand tribe, one of the Pathan tribes on the northwest frontier of Pakistan, for a picnic in Takht-I-Bahi, the ruin of an early Buddhist monastery. We got there, up a very narrow rocky path which you could follow on foot or if you had a donkey, say, but not wide enough for even a jeep. We thought it was going to be a very rough affair, but when we arrived in the ruin, big chambers without roofs, etc., our host had provided — I don't know how, probably by people carrying things up on their heads — oriental carpets on the ground, tables with tablecloths and silverware and crockery, whole sheep roasting and platters of food and fresh fruit. It was an absolutely astonishing sight to walk through this sandy, rough area and then to find such lavish hospitality where we'd expected almost nothing.

I don't remember but possibly our DCM Barrington King and his wife Sarah were there; and our youngest daughter, a student at Dartmouth, who was visiting us, was with us. She was and is a lovely blond girl. The younger brother of the chief of the Mohmand tribe took a shine to her and wrote to her, sent her cards and things (laughing) afterwards. There were no Pakistani women there, because women in provincial areas were always in seclusion (purdah) and didn't participate at all in social events. My daughter was not at all interested in forming any kind of an attachment with this young man because she was afraid she would disappear forever if anything came of it. This event offered a really interesting contrast [to Buckingham Palace].

Q: I see that you really had your entire time as DCM or Chief of Mission after 1972, and yet you had really witnessed under Mrs. Bruce what it was like before then. Over the years, how did you, as I think I asked earlier, transfer the traditional role you had seen and

experienced to the expected behavior of the day? Which was, that women were able to "do their own thing." How did you manage a Fourth of July reception and other big events?

SPIERS: Well, I always assumed that I had no right to demand or request, even, any help from any other wives, but I always accepted any volunteer help that was offered, and there always was volunteer help offered. Always the military attach#s, and very often CIA wives too, were more cooperative than State Department wives, although there were always a few who volunteered help. So I just assumed that I would be responsible for organizing it, either me personally or me and whatever household staff there might have been.And it worked. When there were charitable events that they wanted American Embassy wives to participate in, there was a technique that worked very well. I always joined the American Women's club and I would just make the assumption, which probably wasn't accurate but was useful to me, that what they wanted was American wives, not necessarily American Embassy wives. And I would go to the American Women's club and say, "The Pakistanis are having a big bazaar and would like to have American participation in it" and turn it over to the appropriate committee, then say, "In what way can I (laughing) be of any help to you?" And just really got rid of it in that way. I didn't keep the responsibility myself, I'd turn it over to the American Women's club. There were always many people who wanted to do such things and it worked very well.

Q: It seems like a very fine technique to me! (both laugh) How did you keep up women's activities — maybe in London it took care of itself.

SPIERS: There was a very active American Embassy Wives association that I had nothing to do with organizing. I joined it but I wasn't the president of it. In London, the Ambassador's wife was, but as the DCM's wife I was an honorary member of the board. And I was always active — we had a speaker's bureau and went out to give talks to English women's groups. I really enjoyed that, it was one of the most interesting aspects of the involvement I had in that organization.

The Women's Institute, say, or the mothers' club at a church or something, would request the American Embassy Wives Association to send them a speaker. We had a list of subjects we would talk about — the educational system in the United States, or The White House, or National Parks — a variety of subjects. They would choose one, and you would go — sometimes with slides, more often not — and give a short speech and then have a long discussion period because they had a lot of questions and it was hard to know just what they wanted to know, unless you turned it into a discussion meeting. It was a lot of fun.

Q: Did people specialize in specific areas?

SPIERS: Yes.

Q: You probably could build up a store of slides and quite a presentation over a number of years.

SPIERS: And USIA always had some good materials to use for this purpose. I can recall one time I went to a senior citizens group. Unfortunately the meeting was right after lunch and (laughing) every single one of them fell asleep. I never knew if it was because my speech was particularly boring o(both dissolve in laughter) ...

Q: But in Ankara or Islamabad, there must have been more need, perhaps, to get the women to participate on their own terms.

SPIERS: Well, there were always people who wanted to participate. I always tried to present the opportunity. I would invite people to meetings at the Embassy residence. There was a very active Officers' wives club in Ankara, where there was a very big American military presence, and I was a member — ex officio, I guess — of that, which did a lot. And then there were a lot of ongoing activities of Turkish-American organizations, because of long standing traditional relationships between Turkish and American women during the historic existence — first in Constantinople / Istanbul, then in Ankara — of our

diplomatic mission. Bill and Phyllis Macomber were our predecessors there and she was extremely active. I mean, they never failed to go to anything — in fact, we had really to cut back. We had children at home still and couldn't keep up with the precedent that the Macombers had set. We always made it clear that we didn't go out on Saturday nights, we felt we needed at least one night at home to relax and be with our family.

But the '72 Directive, except for that difficult experience in the Bahamas with that one young woman, really I don't think was a problem, because there were always people who were anxious to be involved and helpful. All you need is a few.

Q: I think it may have been Robert Woodward who said that the '72 Directive was really beneficial to senior wives because there were always a few who did the work before 1972; and after, you didn't have to ask everybody, you just knew that the few were going to come forward. (she laughs)

SPIERS: I think that's true, and it made it clearer. I think a lot was lost in that Directive, because I think that the recognition that the spouses need was lost in that Directive, and I think that's something we have to get back again.

Q: Macomber in his book, The Angels' Game, said just that, that the lack of recognition was a casualty of the Directive. And it hasn't been resolved. And I don't think it takes two million dollars to resolve it. I think all it takes is to give the spouse a title, a job description, and some form of compensation. Ideally she should be paid, but I think the recognition could come first.

SPIERS: I think, at the very least, if not getting paid, women should earn Social Security and retirement benefits that they would get if they were regularly employed. Because that is the major loss, I think, in practical terms.

Q: Yes. And I'm not sure that they can be given Social Security credit if they're not employed. There again, it probably has to go through Congress but there would have to be some kind of special pension rights or her own pension or something.

SPIERS: I think that's the major practical difficulty. There have been so many tragic stories of [divorced] Foreign Service wives left penniless and without any resources at all. (End of Tape 1, Side A)

Q: (consulting her list of topics) "Aftermath of riots in Pakistan."

SPIERS: Yes. Well, we went to Pakistan in 1981. In 1979, at the same time as the big hostage crisis in Iran, the "students" — in quotation marks, because it was really, I think, fomented from outside the university — the students at the university in Islamabad rioted and burned the Embassy and destroyed the Embassy compound. There were two Americans killed, I believe. The remaining Americans who'd been in the compound were trapped by fire in the secure code room and only barely escaped with their lives onto the roof and had to be removed from there.

It was really a major disaster. We arrived two years later and neither the chancery nor the apartments had been rebuilt This was a 40-acre Embassy compound in the diplomatic enclave in Islamabad. The only intact building on the compound was the Ambassador's residence, because at the time of the riot it was a new building under construction and the rioters left it alone. Construction of that building was continued and completed and we moved into it, but the rest of the compound still contained burned out cars and wrecked buildings.

Q: Sort of a war zone.

SPIERS: It was, it really was. A temporary chancery was elsewhere, a mile or two away in the city, and when my husband went to work in the morning, I was the only American and the only female on this huge compound that was swarming with Pakistani laborers

rebuilding the destroyed buildings. There was a recreation complex — swimming pool and tennis court — at the other end of the compound, and I would occasionally walk down there to swim or use the tennis courts. The laborers, mostly illiterate people from rural areas who had never seen a Western woman before, were absolutely astonished, and shocked, really, because (laughing) Pakistani women don't walk around. I never wore shorts, I would wear either long trousers or a skirt. And they would absolutely down tools and follow me wherever I went.

I felt very ill at ease, very threatened, really. I never put it into effect but thought in my own mind, “What am I going to do? Here I am, essentially alone surrounded by potential rioters, if something happens.” So I thought that I should probably have a chador, you know, the black robe that Muslim women cover themselves with completely, and just slip out the gate and disappear. I never actually felt threatened enough to do that, but had it in the back of my mind.

That's really what I meant by “the aftermath.” I didn't enjoy that aspect of our time in Pakistan, because I did feel vulnerable and isolated in that situation. The rebuilding was completed just as we left, and I think for any subsequent people it was a much more agreeable place than it was for me.

Q: Did you actually get to the point of buying the chador in case you were ...

SPIERS: No, I just thought about it.

Q: I think I would have too.

SPIERS: My plan was to keep plenty of Pakistani money on hand and bribe our head bearer to tell whoever came that I was his wife. I would not need to say anything because women aren't expected to say anything. But I never really had to put that into practice, but the Kings, who were there as DCM, had been there during this riot and they were really — not just the Kings but everybody who had been there in that time — quite traumatized.

It was a devastating evacuation, with people killed — altogether, two Americans, two Pakistani local employees, and two rioters. With a potential for many more but fortunately it didn't happen.

Q: That legacy remained when you arrived.

SPIERS: In my mind at any rate. Along with burned out cars and smoke stained buildings and so on.

Q: Then you came back to Washington. Your husband was in the very high profile Management position. Were you much involved in that in Washington? Or did you more or less lead your own life?

SPIERS: I led my own life. I had always done so in Washington. I wasn't perhaps as devoted a Foreign Service wife as some others, but I always felt that the Foreign Service was my whole life when I was overseas and only part of my life when I was back in Washington. I had a full-time job at the Starrhill Press. It was a flexible job, and I was treasurer of AAFSW for a good many years, and always involved with Bookfair, and so on but not as involved as some others — like Betty Atherton, say.

Q: I'm really interested in your attitude toward compensation and the role of the spouse. I think you've defined that fairly clearly — when you're abroad, you are a Foreign Service wife, and when you're at home, you're not.

SPIERS: Except, you know, where we're required and really — well actually even socially in my husband's last job in the Department we didn't have as many social requirements because his dealings were largely with Americans in Congress and so on, not with foreign Missions here. So even socially it wasn't as demanding as other jobs that he's had.

Q: What about the change in the role of the spouse during your 23 years, from 1966 to '89? Did you feel that your role changed? Well, obviously there was change in your role as

your husband moved up in the Service, but did you notice any particular change in your attitude toward the Service over the years or your expectations from the Service?

SPIERS: Well, I think that in the last ten years ... (pause) it seems to me — well, I think that Shultz as Secretary of State, was very supportive of the spouse's role in the Service but in a very traditional way. I think he was influenced by Obie, who was a very traditional wife, but I think certainly since then, and to some extent during those years, that the Department has been less and less supportive of the senior spouses. It's partly, I think, an economic problem. So many things have happened that have made life harder for senior spouses in those years.

Q: At home? Abroad? In both places?

SPIERS: Both. Well, in posts: I'm thinking of New York, now, because I talk to Alice [Pickering] a lot and it's very hard for her. For example, Congress has denied salary supplement to those people in the USUN Mission in New York and it's much more expensive to live there than in Washington. But they take the position that since it's in the U.S., they don't need a salary supplement. But rents are much higher, food is much higher, everything is much more expensive than here. So, many individuals have had to curtail their assignments.

Q: Or else be tremendously out-of-pocket.

SPIERS: And if you have a young family, you can't afford to do that, they just can't afford to subsidize the Foreign Service, and this is what they're doing. One person reported to Alice that at the orientation program for ambassadorial couples they were told by someone from the Budget and Fiscal office that they should expect to be out-of-pocket $15,000 — not that they wouldn't be reimbursed but the procedure is that you pay for everything and then submit vouchers to recover your outlay. So really you're floating a loan to the U.S. Government.

Q: The U.S. Government is using your money and you, meanwhile, are being denied interest. Although it wouldn't be a tremendous amount, still a few thousand dollars or more.

SPIERS: And the regulation now in effect Stateside and I understand also overseas is that the Ambassador's wife does not have the use of the official car and driver unless she's going somewhere with her husband. So if, for example, the prime minister's wife invites you to a ladies' lunch, you can't be driven there in your husband's car even if he's not using it. This is true in New York at USUN and I think also true overseas now. Which is a silly step backwards, and a major inconvenience.

If, for example, the officer is working late, the car can't come to the residence, pick up the wife, then drive to the office and pick up the husband. It has to be the other way around. She's not supposed to ride in that car without her husband. (both laugh) It's unbelievable. Well, I'm sure some do it; it's a silly law.

I think the feeling people get from this multitude of rather nitpicking regulations is that they are suspected of gouging the Government, being out to cheat and get everything they can from it. This is not a comfortable feeling, it makes life much less pleasant.

Q: Do you feel that you subsidized the Foreign Service over your years?

SPIERS: I don't think we did; no. But we made it a deliberate policy not to do that. I know that the Macombers spent a lot of their own resources in entertaining in Turkey before we got there. We had kids in college then and — we didn't say to anybody but ourselves “we cannot afford to do this, we have other requirements for Martha and Peter”. But we restricted our entertaining to what we could afford on representational funds, and that was that. We've always done that. We basically and philosophically don't approve of (laughing) subsidizing the government.

Q: I have two friends who were out-of-pocket enormously at one very stylish post where we had French cuisine, French couture, it was a lovely post, my favorite post. Both of them

were significantly out-of-pocket to play a popular, chic role at the post. Both of them said years later how foolish it was, a waste of money. They would never do it again.

SPIERS: And I don't think it's necessary. I mean, even in London, where there could be so many potential demands, you can shape your entertainment arrangements to fit whatever resources are available and it works perfectly well. Lots of people are invited who don't need to be invited, the sort of Diplomatic hangers-on, and if you keep your guest list to those who are significant in one way or another to American interests, it's perfectly easy to keep functions smaller. That's what we did, and we did the same in every post. We never subsidized the Government.

Q: We didn't, either, because I don't think you should be asked to, really.

SPIERS: No. And I think you just have to plan not to.

Q: Sometimes its an ego thing for couples who don't have children. They can devote more time, resources, energy to the Foreign Service, and some are willing to do that. Did the Macombers have children?

SPIERS: No. They married quite late. Phyllis was one of Dulles's secretaries in the Department. [She was also Dean Rusk's secretary.]

Q: I'm rather interested in Macomber because from everything I read about the '72 Directive, all trails go back to his office. I would like to interview her, because I would like to know how much, what part she played in his perception of the spouse's role. Because one of the things he did was release "Management Reform Bulletin 20" on spouses, which was no reform at all. Dorothy Stansbury was asked by someone in Macomber's office to get together a task force of spouses to draw up guidelines — it was all part of the reform movement of the 70s — and she got together what my husband calls "ciphers": there's not a name that you recognize, no one of any standing in spouse issues, no one

whose husband was particularly well-known in the Department; just a group of women she assembled, and they developed a set of guidelines.

Now this, mind you, is 1972. And they were unbelievably traditional. MRB 20 went out as the new reformed status of spouses. If Macomber had really been sensitized to spouse issues at that point, he never would have released it in the Department. It's my theory that he only became sensitized later, after that. Whether he got married about that time or whether it was because the WAO group marched up to him and wanted their rights — equal assignment opportunity, equal promotion opportunity, with spouse issues as a sideline. It was out of all that that the '72 Directive was developed. And the Directive was really written, if I can believe the tape and the transcript in the Schlesinger Library, was written by two young men, Rick Williamson, an FSO, and Bill Salisbury, of USIS. Williamson is now an attorney in Washington and Salisbury's wife Diane is an Officer and I believe he's retired; they may still be a tandem couple.

SPIERS: Oh, yes, I knew them. They were with us in Nassau.

Q: Well, Salisbury and Williamson wrote the '72 Directive, with the help of a very ardent young feminist, Carol Pardon, who has since divorced her husband, Raymond Pardon, and I can't find her. But the Directive was really marshaled through by a young activist group who hadn't had an awful lot of assignments overseas — none of them had been in principal Officer positions.

SPIERS: From what I know of Bill Macomber, and I may be doing him an injustice, I can't believe he was very involved, or even very interested, in women's role; because of what I've seen of him in other contexts, he didn't seem so to me.

Q: That's interesting, because the women — Mary Olmstead, Marguerite Cooper-King, Barbara Good, Idris Rozelle — they felt that he helped them and had their interests at heart.

SPIERS: I may be wrong, I don't know him very well. When you succeed someone in a post, you get to know them in a funny way. I mean, without knowing them personally, you know things about them —

Q: You know an awful lot about them and they know nothing about you. (she laughs) I found that to be the case on one occasion.

SPIERS: — so I may be misreading the little I know about him very seriously; I probably am. He certainly had an interesting role in Turkey in the 60s. He was, for example, absolutely devoted to animals, to dogs particularly, and he used the Ambassador's residence as an SPCA — he had at one point 13 stray dogs that he had picked up and was nurturing back to health. We inherited one of them; we refused to inherit more than one.

Q: In all that lye read about him, I don't think I've read about his "animal rights"! Well, we were talking about the role of the spouse, and the spouse issue, and then I preempted your tape time by talking about the Directive and how it came about. And, just to finish this topic, AAFSW, which you've worked with so closely over the years, had no input at all in the '72 Directive, which affected the life of every spouse; and AAFSW was the representative of the spouse, which I thought was very peculiar until I did some research and found that the New York Times had a headline just two months after the Directive came out that women across the country, according to their poll, were equally divided on women's lib, pro and against. So AAFSW was just really being a microcosm of the rest of the country because they could not arrive at a consensus. And so they had no input at all. If women had been more organized in those days, someone would have been a lawyer, someone would have known that according to English law, your silence is consent, and any ad hoc group could have gone to Macomber from AAFSW and said "we don't represent the organization officially but we are an ad hoc group and we do object to this" and they could have done it, and they didn't.

I want to interview Sue Parsons. She's very busy at OBC now because they”re very understaffed because of budget cuts. She was secretary of AAFSW at the time and I read her notes, which were in the file at the Housing office. In that entire year there was no mention of the Directive — no mention. And yet I've been told there were spirited discussions taking place. What happened? (she laughs)

SPIERS: Well, I wasn't involved with AAFSW at that point. My active involvement began in 1983 when I came back from our last overseas post. I had always paid my dues and been on the roles but I never had been involved in their activities.

Q: You might be interested to know that last year one of their great accomplishments was to get volunteer pins in recognition of volunteer work.

SPIERS: And were they “awarded” by the Secretary?

Q: I think they are AAFSW/Secretary pins — I didn't attend Foreign Service Day because I was in Philadelphia — but there were five, one for each geographical area; FSOs qualified for these pins too if they had done volunteer work.

SPIERS: Hmmmm...

Q: Really, it seems to me that, as you say, with the use of the official car being a very good example, we've gone backwards, we've lost ground.

SPIERS: I think we have. I think the whole atmosphere of suspicion of Foreign Service families and spouses, I think it's probably (she laughs) Jesse Helms's doing. He's so suspicious of the motives, I mean he thinks that we have been a group of people who were living in the lap of luxury at government expense, I don't think it's only Jesse Helms but I think it's an ultraconservative group that objects to the feminist, occasionally fairly strident, voices that have been raised on behalf of Foreign Service spouses, but usually

not, usually reasoned and well modulated and not strident, at all. But I think that it's a reaction of ultra-conservatives to the whole spectrum of women's concerns.

Q: I found Susan Baker to be very traditional.

SPIERS: And really basically not very interested, do you think? I think she's perfectly charming and polite.-

Q: I always call the Secretary's office and ask that his spouse be honorary sponsor of the benefit tea which we have every fall, and they always say yes. The first year Mrs. Shultz didn't come, the next year she did. And she was rather interested. The next year Marlene [Eagleburger] came, and the next year I got a call about three days beforehand — you can always tell when the wife of the Secretary of State is planning to come, as you well know, and I knew by the questions I was being asked that Susan Baker was planning to attend. What does she have to do? Well, she can only arrive at this hour and stay this long, et cetera, et cetera.

What actually happened was, she appeared at the top of the steps for her name tag saying, “I have to park my car somewhere.” She'd driven herself, so someone ran down and found a parking place for her behind DACOR House. She seemed very interested in the tea and was one of the last people to leave. So her supposedly tight schedule was created to give her a graceful exit from a boring situation if she needed it.

It was interesting, because the women she was talking to were predominantly retired, they were people of the past, like Lesley Dorman, who came up and said, “I just wanted to meet you? (both laugh) And I think it was rather refreshing to Susan Baker not to have people fawning over her. And of course I did manage to introduce her to Anne Kauzlarich who followed up with her for AAFSW, and Mrs. Baker relaxed and had a good time and I think she saw Foreign Service wives in a different perspective. Now, whether she'll come this

year again, whether she'll remember that interest from one year to the next, I don't know. [Addendum: She attended the October 1991 tea.]

SPIERS: I think she's very shy and I think her major interest is religion. I think she's really got her own life, which is entirely separate from the State Department and the Foreign Service.

Q: I think there are three sets of children — hers, his and theirs. Our daughter and son-in-law took Susan Baker's daughter's apartment here when the daughter left for the University of Texas law school, where my son-in-law had just graduated. It was interesting because he had just graduated from UT and was coming to Washington to work for Robert Strauss's firm, and Susan's daughter had been interning at Strauss's firm and was leaving Washington for the University of Texas.

I think it would be interesting if we had really not an ardent feminist, not a strident feminist, but a “women's rights spouse” as spouse of the Secretary of State.

SPIERS: It would be. We can't really select the Secretary of State with that in mind, can we? (both laugh) Much as we'd like to.

Q: Unfortunately, no. I used to talk to the DCMs' wives [at the Foreign Service Institute], then for budget reasons that was cut back and now I only talk to the incoming group. The people who are DCMs' wives now are the ones who were perhaps the young advocates of the '72 Directive at the time it took effect. It would be interesting to see what their reaction is, now that they are going out and trying to run a post.

I was very surprised to hear, at one of the meetings I sat in on for the DCM's wives, that “your duty is to make your Ambassador's wife look good and to be her help mate.” I mean, it was so out of the old book that I really wasn't sure I was hearing right.

SPIERS: I think that's wrong, too. I don't approve of that instruction at all. I think that her duty is to organize her Foreign Service life according to her likes and what she thinks is important, whether it's her family or supporting the Ambassador's wife or pursuing her career or whatever she thinks is important.

Q: Did you ever have an opportunity to speak up in that capacity when your husband was Under Secretary for Management?

SPIERS: I did participate in the Ambassadorial Seminar which happens a couple of times a year. The thing I always felt it was important to say to an Ambassador's wife going out to post — because sometimes I think people do get carried away with their own significance — was to remember that when they make a request of, say, the General Services people, or the Admin, their request is going to be met before anybody else's is, that usually it has the force of a demand even if they only phrase it as a request; and that they have to remember that they're competing for scarce resources and that they have to not allow themselves to be put in a position of being demanding. Sometimes they don't mean to be that but they're interpreted that way, because people jump to do what they think the Ambassador's wife wants them to do.

I remember that in Pakistan I had to tell my household staff that they were no longer allowed to call the Embassy to ask General Services people to come and make repairs, because the staff were so demanding and would say, “Memsahib has ordered you to... Do this right away, before lunch.” And I never said any such thing. There were words put in my mouth, so I had to say, “You tell me what needs doing and I will put in the request.” I would do a work order and take my place in line and wait if it wasn't urgent. And I think it's very important for Ambassadors' wives to remember that their words have more influence than they think they do, than they're accustomed to, and that they must not allow their rank to be abused.

Q: Did you think your point was well taken?

SPIERS: I think sometimes it was. Because I think it's just so difficult (she laughs) — the domestic staff, particularly, enjoys the power that they perceive when they're part of the Ambassador's household.

Q: I think it's more than perceived, (she laughs) I think it's actual. A staff that has been at the residence for, oh years and years and years, has a power and they know it.

SPIERS: And you certainly have to step on it, I think. When we were in Turkey, at the time of the oil crisis late 70s, when many of the Embassy people didn't have any heat in their apartments — it's a very cold climate, about like Washington in the winter, below freezing, snow and so on — we always had heat in the Embassy residence. So we opened up part of the residence to families with preschool children — those attending school could get warm there, but toddlers and babies could come to the residence to play during the day. In an unheated apartment on a cold winter day it's miserable, there's no way to get comfortable. I think the point that I tried to make is that you usually have a position of greater privilege than anybody else in the Embassy and you have to remember that it's not yours personally, it's there to be shared.

Q: Have you ever put any of these thoughts in writing anywhere?

SPIERS: No.

Q: Well, of course they will be when we've transcribed the tape. Any other thoughts on being an Ambassador's wife? These are such sensible approaches.

SPIERS: Well, I think, mainly that — don't abuse your privileges, and share them where reasonable and beneficial to do that.

Q: It's so important for post morale.

SPIERS: Yes, I think so. In Ankara, too, there were no playgrounds for children, it's a city of apartment buildings. So in summer we opened up a playschool in the residence grounds. They would meet there every morning and run around on the grass among the trees. I think that was a good way to use the otherwise beautifully tended but unused acres of the grounds there. I think that was a beneficial thing to do.

Q: You see, this is the type of thing I think should be being taught at the Foreign Service Institute at the Overseas Briefing Center. What I find we have at the moment — Lee Lacy, in charge, is a very charming, talented woman but she is not a Foreign Service wife and she has never served as a Foreign Service wife. Now her deputy is Sue Parsons, who is retired, and the longer you're retired the further you're removed from the Service and the less, I feel, you have the "right" (she laughs) to tell people what they should do about it.

Since Guido has been retired for six years, I try very, very hard, as I mentioned earlier, to find people who are currently in the Service to give me input so that I'm talking to these young people about something that's relevant. At OBC, I thought the understanding was that you were supposed to have a spouse in one of those positions who had just returned from abroad, who was au courant on the situation abroad.

SPIERS: Well, I'm certainly not au courant any more with any of those, because our last overseas post ended in 1983, eight years ago. But I think you'd do well to talk to Alice Pickering, who is still involved and has the interesting perspective of New York. That's a very difficult Mission for Foreign Service people who are posted at USUN. And maybe Judy Watson too... Alec Watson is the deputy to Tom Pickering, the Ambassador.

One aspect of Foreign Service wives that has changed a lot in recent years is the percentage of foreign born wives, and they are often more eager to participate in Embassy activities than the American wives.

Q: Foreign born spouses are viewed by a lot of people as a current phenomenon. They're not, they've always been there.

SPIERS: Really? Overseas we found a very small percentage were American born, I mean many were naturalized; but then I had nothing to compare it with, and you have an historical perspective.

Q: Yes, and I don't know what the percentage was in the 30s. Today, it's pretty high, maybe 50 percent?

SPIERS: I would guess, certainly. It's very high. And of course there are more of them. There are more spouses and therefore there are more foreign-born spouses. It will be interesting to learn what the percentage was, if there is any way we can find out. But I think they're very willing, as a rule. Yes, that certainly has been my experience. I think they often want to prove how thoroughly American they are. This is one way of doing it.

Q: What a psychological job that is, really.

SPIERS: It is. I think that when you consider how difficult it is to adjust to as many foreign posts as an American, to think of giving up your own country and becoming an American and then going to a foreign post, it's a double transition. It must be extremely difficult.

***

BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: Ronald I. Spiers

Spouse Entered FS: January 1955Left Service: June 30, 1989

Status: Spouse of Retiree

Posts: 1955-66EC (after graduate school) Washington, DC 1966-69London, England 1969-73Washington, DC 1973-74Nassau, Bahamas 1974-77London, England 1977-80Ankara, Turkey 1980-81Washington, DC 1981-83Islamabad, Pakistan 1983-89Washington, DC

Spouse's Position: 1955-66OIC Disarmament and Deputy Director and Director NATO Office 1966-69Political Counselor 1969-73Assistant Secretary PM 1973-74Chief of Mission 1974-77Deputy Chief of Mission 1977-80Chief of Mission 1980-81Assistant Secretary INR 1981-83Chief of Mission 1983-89Under Secretary for Management

Place/Date of birth: Warren, Rhode Island; 17 August, 1928

Maiden Name: Patience Baker

Parents (Name, Profession):

Harold Dean Baker, Jr. Precious metal refiner

Lucy McRae Baker, housewifeSchools (Prep, University):

Burr and Burton Seminary, Manchester, Vermont;

Wellesley College, 1946-49;

George Washington University BA 1981

Date/Place of Marriage: Peru, Vermont; June 18, 1949

Children:

Deborah Spiers Wood, b. 1951

Peter Anselm Spiers 1954

Martha Lucy Spiers 195

Sara Jane Spiers 1963

Profession: None

Volunteer and Paid Positions held:A. At Post: London - English Speaking Union, Hospitality Committee; International Social Service Annual Bazaar; American Embassy Wive's Group, Speaker's Bureau. Turkey - American Women's Club; Turkish American Women's Club, Bookmobile

B. In Washington, DC: League of Women Voters; Co-op Nursery School, PTA; AAFSW Board, Treasurer (All positions were volunteer); Starrhill Publishing Co. (Paid)

End of interview